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Melinda Haag, top federal prosecutor in S.F., is stepping down

By **Bob Egelko** Updated 8:31 pm, Wednesday, July 29, 2015



U.S. Attorney Melinda Haag covered the coast.

U.S. Attorney Melinda Haag, who handled criminal cases against state Sen. Leland Yee and baseball star Barry Bonds during five years as the chief federal prosecutor for coastal Northern California, announced her resignation Wednesday.

Haag, 53, told staffers at a morning meeting in San Francisco that she will step down Sept. 1 and spend some time with her family, said Abraham Simmons, a spokesman for the office. He said she has not specified a reason for leaving and has not yet lined up another job.

Haag, a UC Berkeley Law School graduate, spent 14 years in private law practice and nine years as a federal prosecutor in Los Angeles and San Francisco before President Obama appointed her in August 2010 to lead the office where she had formerly headed the white-collar crime division. The office has 130 lawyers and handles federal cases in an area that stretches from Monterey County to the Oregon border.

Simmons said no decision has been made on who will run the office when Haag leaves.

One of Haag's highest-profile cases was the undercover investigation that snared Yee, then a Democratic state senator from San Francisco, and a number of associates trying to pay off federal agents posing as political contributors. Yee and four co-defendants pleaded guilty to racketeering charges July 1. Charges are pending against two dozen defendants, including a former gang leader in San Francisco's Chinatown.

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Haag's office was unsuccessful, however, in the criminal case against Bonds, the former Giants outfielder and baseball's all-time home run leader, who was charged with lying to a federal grand jury when he denied ever knowingly taking steroids or other performance-enhancing drugs.

The perjury case was hampered by the refusal of Bonds' former trainer, Greg Anderson, to testify against him, and by prosecutors' failure to provide jurors with the transcript of a recording of Anderson discussing drug injections.

Jurors deadlocked on three perjury charges, which Haag decided not to retry, and instead convicted Bonds of obstructing justice by giving a rambling answer to a question about whether Anderson had ever given him drugs he could inject by himself.

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A federal appeals court threw out that conviction, and the case ended last week when the Justice Department decided against a further appeal.

Another disputed issue involved federal actions against medical marijuana suppliers. Despite the Obama administration's stated policy of deferring to state medical marijuana laws, Haag and California's three other top federal prosecutors announced a crackdown on pot dispensaries in

2011, saying they would threaten landlords with prosecution unless they evicted tenants who were supplying cannabis in violation of federal law.

Hundreds of dispensaries were forced to shut down. Haag's office is seeking to close two of the Bay Area's largest operations, the Harborside Health Center in Oakland and the Berkeley Patients Group, both locally licensed.

Miranda Kane, who headed the criminal division in Haag's office from 2010 to 2013, said the hallmark of Haag's tenure was "to improve the quality of the cases that the office was bringing and to take on difficult cases and challenging cases." Kane said Haag had improved the office's overall reputation and its relations with law enforcement and defense lawyers.

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